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AFGHAN CIVIC ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM (ACEP)

DECEMBER 2013 – DECEMBER 2018

\$70 MILLION

OVERVIEW

The key to a strong democracy and transparent government is a robust media and civil society sector. USAID's Afghan Civic Engagement Program (ACEP) will ensure that Afghan citizens are well informed about the actions and performance of government institutions and officials, and that they have the means to freely influence public policy and advocate for political reform.

The program aims to achieve this goal through five program areas: (1) regular civil society organization (CSO) engagement with government; (2) increased CSO and media thematic expertise in democracy and governance; (3) expanded civic engagement; (4) improved access to independent news and public affairs information; and (5) increased CSO organizational capacity.

CURRENT ACTIVITIES

- Support civil society engagement with government to increase CSOs' ability to advocate for policy priorities through supporting legislative working groups, convening community dialogues, providing women's empowerment and youth activism grants, and assisting citizen monitoring and reporting of government performance and service delivery.
- Increase CSOs' thematic expertise through helping CSOs deepen their research capabilities and technical area expertise, supporting the creation or strengthening of CSO networks based on sector, issue, and/or geography, and helping CSOs improve their legal enabling environment and image within their communities.
- Expand civic engagement through outreach efforts to citizens in all provinces, wider media outreach with messages focused on civic education topics related to citizens' roles and responsibilities in a democracy, encouraging raised voices on issues of concern to individual communities as well as increasing awareness of elections-related issues and advocating citizen engagement and voting.
- Improve access to quality, independent news through supporting media advocacy and policy reform, increasing journalistic professionalism, organized sector discussions, sponsor internships, and support public interest programming on civic participation and social issues through outlets such as Salam Watandar and Pajhwok News Agency.
- Increase CSOs' organizational capacity through institutional support grants to key partner organizations and supporting the Afghan Institute for Civil Society (AICS), which serves as an institute for certification of Afghan CSOs to operate effectively and manage funds independently.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- 404, 876 Afghans (182,399 women and 222,477 men; approximately 65% of all participants were male and female youth) reached through civic education and awareness raising activities
 - 8810 (4884 men; 3926 women) Afghans took part in community dialogues.
 - 7,758 Afghans (5739 men; 2019 women), including citizens and government representatives, took part in district and provincial level dialogues.
- Awarded 168 grants worth \$10.6 million to Afghan CSOs and media organizations to undertake a variety of activities including:
 - Civic Education;
 - Women's Empowerment;
 - Monitoring of Government Commitments;
 - Civil Society Capacity Development; and
 - Youth inclusion and a culture of volunteers;
- Organized and hosted:
 - 2014 Civic Engagement Social Media Conference (180 attendees);
 - 2015 and 2016 Partnering for Public Good Summit (106 attendees), promoting the value of CSOs;
 - 2015 Media and the Transformation Decade National Conference (100 attendees);
 - 2016 Women CSO Leaders' Summit in Kabul (130 women-led CSOs and female advocates);
 - 2016 National Conference for Persons with Disabilities, facilitated for MoLSAMD. (340 attendees);

- 2016 Framework for Cooperation Conference. Attendees included more than 170 civil society representatives; 40 government officials; 20 media organizations and a small number of international NGOs.
- Facilitated civil society involvement in:
 - 2014 The London Conference on Afghanistan, in collaboration with British and Irish Agencies Group Afghanistan (BAAG);
 - 2015 Afghanistan-Pakistan (AF-Pak) Civil Society Conference in Islamabad;
 - 2016 NATO Warsaw Summit, in collaboration with BAAG;
 - 2016 Brussels Conference on Afghanistan, in collaboration with BAAG;
- Provided capacity development and technical assistance to civil society organizations in the areas of:
 - Organizational development;
 - Proposal writing;
 - Civic education;
 - Community mobilization;
 - Gender mainstreaming;
 - Good governance;
 - Peace-building;
- Provided capacity development on secondary research for evidence based advocacy to civil society organizations and linked civil society and research organizations.
- Provided technical assistance to national level advocacy groups including:
 - The Civil Society Advocacy Group on the National Budget;
 - The Parliamentary Technical Working Group on Family Law (PTWG-FL); and
 - The Advocacy Committee for People with Disabilities (ACPD);
- Provided technical assistance to the Civil Society Joint Working Group (CSJWG)
- Implemented an annual Emerging Civil Society Leaders (ECSL) Program. In total 102 young people (43 women; 59 men) have taken part in the program.
- Implemented study tours as part of the ECSL Program to Bulgaria, Kazakhstan, Bosnia and Sri Lanka.
- Provided technical assistance to the development of and involved ECSL Program participants in the development of Afghanistan National Youth Strategy.
- Trained 2,405 (602 women; 1,803 men) journalists in basic and advanced journalism, anti-corruption and trafficking in persons thematic reporting, and data journalism. Provided access to internet and multimedia skills training for 12,051 citizens (3,327 women; 8,724 men), through the four Anaar Multimedia Centers.
- Conducted seminar on Civil Society Laws and Regulations in East of Afghanistan for 45 representatives of CSOs
- Conducted a seminar on Access to Information Law in East of Afghanistan for 47 representatives of CSOs.
- CSOs – Government Coordination Working Group had its first meeting in PY 4 on Draft Foundation Law.
- Afghanistan Institute for Civil Society (AICS) held its first, second and third certification award ceremony in three sessions and awarded certificates to 15 CSOs in the presence of 352 representatives from government, civil society, international community, private sector and media, including a message from the Minister of Economy (read out by the Senior Advisor to the

Minister), AKDN Diplomatic Representative, Chair of AICS and member of the Afghan parliament. Five of the CSOs obtained award of best practice.

- Informed over 300 CSOs on the AICS certification program through orientation sessions/meetings in Kabul and provinces.
- AICS organized civil society thematic roundtables as a cross-cutting activity to provide Afghan CSOs with an opportunity to discuss, debate and identify the challenges and opportunities confronting them.

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E-mail: kblaidocinformation@usaid.gov
Web: <http://www.usaid.gov/afghanistan>